



USDA APHIS undersecretary encourages participating in voluntary NAIS

To the editor:

As last year's outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the United Kingdom once again demonstrated, foreign animal disease outbreaks do have costly affects on producers' livelihoods, consumer confidence and a country's ability to keep markets open.

The capability to respond quickly and effectively to an animal disease event is of utmost importance to stop the spread of the disease. Animal health officials need to know the animals involved, where they are located, where they have been, and any other animals that may have been exposed to the disease. The sooner such reliable data is available, the sooner affected animals can be located, appropriate response measures can be taken, and disease spread can be halted. The United States has such a system – the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) – but we need the support of the animal agriculture industry to successfully implement it. NAIS is a voluntary partnership between producers and their government.

An outbreak of a disease like FMD in the United States would immediately disrupt production, require the quarantine and destruction of unprecedented numbers of livestock herds, and suspend industry's access to world markets. It would financially cripple America's animal agriculture economy. The good news is that having the ability to rapidly trace the movement of infected or exposed animals through NAIS would help limit all of these devastating impacts. America needs the protection a successful national animal identification system would provide.

There's no question that traceability is the key to protecting animal health and marketability in this country if a disease like FMD entered the country. We also need to ensure that we are able to respond quickly to outbreaks of other animal diseases like bovine tuberculosis. Retrieving animal location and movement data within 48 hours is the long-term goal of NAIS. This quick response is optimal for efficient and effective disease containment and helps to lessen disease spread, as well as reassure our trading partners and the public that our production system - already the finest in the world - is protected in every possible way.

Without NAIS, animal health officials investigating a disease outbreak must often use sales receipts, telephone calls and human memory to trace animal movements. It's a slow

process, and in the rapid-paced, technology-centric 21st century, it isn't good enough. In contrast, NAIS provides several solutions that would prevent such scenarios in the future. It provides standards for the collection and management of electronic animal identification and movement records, improving the accuracy and thoroughness of available records and searchable databases. NAIS would also greatly reduce the time and costs associated with animal disease response overall.

Recently, USDA released a comprehensive business plan designed to support progress toward our traceability goal. The plan outlines key milestones and implementation strategies including the prioritizing of NAIS among species and sectors. The report recognizes the need for a comprehensive solution that builds on existing animal health systems, speeding traceability progress. I encourage anyone involved with production agriculture to learn more about NAIS and the benefits of traceability by going to our Web site, www.usda.gov/nais.

NAIS is voluntary. NAIS is ready now. NAIS is worthy of your participation. The first step, premises registration, is free and easy to complete. Animal identification and tracing, the next steps, are also voluntary and available to you. Join the almost 448,000 producers across the country who have chosen to become part of the system.

I'm a rancher, and my premises is registered. Yours should be, too. By registering, you will take an important step to ensure that our nation's livestock system is protected from the devastating effects of an animal disease outbreak.

- Bruce Knight, USDA APHIS Marketing and Regulatory Programs undersecretary